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### Primrose, Diana (fl. 1630)

*Author of the English poem, A Chaine of Pearle*  
Absolutely nothing is known about the poet Diana Primrose except that, in London in 1630 under her name, the printer Thomas Paine published the poem, *A Chaine of Pearle. Or a Memoriall of the peerles Graces, and Heroick Vertues of Queene Elizabeth, of Glorious Memory*. Evidence suggests that Primrose might have been either the daughter or wife of Gilbert Primrose, a minister in the French Protestant church who returned to England in 1622/1623. However, antiquarian John Nichols (1745–1826) proposed that Diana Primrose might be a pseudonym; certainly, the Latin epigraph to the poem, “*Dat rosa mel apibus qua sugit aranea virus*” (“the rose gives honey to the bees, from which the spider sucks venom”) plays on the author’s name, Primrose. The poem, composed in rhyming iambic pentameter, opens with a dedication to “All Noble Ladies, and Gentlewomen”; these lines are followed by a second dedicatory poem in praise of Diana by another unknown poet who signs herself as Dorothy Berry. A third dedicatory piece, the Induction, directly addresses Queen Elizabeth herself: “Thou English goddess, empress of our Sex, / O thou whose name still reigns in all our hearts.” The poem goes on to celebrate the virtues of the queen (Eliza, she is called), and, associating her “empress” with Diana, the virgin goddess, Primrose presents Elizabeth as an exemplar for all women to emulate in the realms of education, religion, and the intellect.

Some scholars have suggested a composition date much earlier than the print date, placing the work among poems written in remembrance of the recently deceased queen. Others who support a composition date closer to 1630 argue that the poem may have been

intended either as a veiled criticism of Charles I or perhaps as a nostalgic look back on a more enlightened age.

Regardless of the identity of Diana Primrose, *A Chaine of Pearle* stands as an example of the ways in which some seventeenth-century women-centered poets evoked the image of Elizabeth I as a model of female erudition and autonomy.

Tara Wood

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## Printers, the Book Trade, and Women

For centuries, scholars have placed women at the margins of the early modern book industry, this in sharp contrast to their contributions as illuminators and scribes in late medieval manuscript production. Knowledge of women’s roles in the early book industry is hampered by scattered and incomplete sources. Chief among these are the books themselves. Even when she published a book, only rarely would a woman sign her name in the colophon. She remained anonymous. Social constraints also reinforced the notion that a woman was incapable of performing certain jobs, including working in a printer’s shop. The nature of movable type technology conspired against her involvement. Presswork, being physically demanding, was considered “men’s work.” A woman’s presence

in the shop was a distraction (from the point of view of the master), one likely to compromise the efficiency and high levels of production expected from skilled artisans. Books were printed in cramped quarters, where pressmen, typesetters, proofreaders, and shop boys rubbed elbows, exchanged crude language, traded insults, and occasionally came to blows. The milieu was decidedly masculine, not suitable for what Renaissance culture generally considered a “gentle spirit.” Jean Huchier, a typesetter who worked in the printing shops of the Parisian businesswoman Charlotte Guillard, praised her as “a woman of great courage” but added that his work was “beyond that of her sex.”

Drawing on new information from documentary and printed sources, social historians and historians of early printing are revising the traditional picture of women as being on the fringes of the early book industry. We are learning, for example, that a printer’s business—even that of a modest typographer—was not usually limited to one shop but rather included multiple shops (for the storage of supplies or purposes of accounting) attached to his place of residence. It was a printing house, where business and family often overlapped. Thus, though she might be barred from the printing shop itself, the wife or daughter of a printer could learn other facets of his business, such as bookkeeping, binding books, and preparing paper for printing. These last two skills, for example, were taken up by nieces of the wife of Bernardino Benali, a Venetian bookseller and printer who in his will (1517) left twenty ducats for their assistance in his business. Now and then, anecdotal evidence confirms a wife’s involvement in her husband’s printing operation. In a letter from 1506, Margarete, the eight-year-old daughter of Johann Amerbach, the eminent printer from Basel, addressed her mother as Frau Barbara Druckerin (Mrs. Barbara Printer). High rates of literacy among wives and daughters of printers also encouraged a strong feminine presence in the trade. While an exceptional case, the four eldest daughters of Christopher Plantin, the il-

lustrious Antwerp publisher, put their linguistic skills to good use proofreading copy in his shops. Also proficient in languages were Sisters Marietta and Rosarietta, who were hired by a monastic press—the Ripoli Press in Florence—to set pages of type for works by Augustine, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Suetonius.

Even more directly—as when the wealth of her dowry passed to her husband—a woman could influence the success of a printing or publishing operation. The marriage of a printer or bookseller often coincided with a downturn in his business and the need to find additional capital. The dowry itself, usually consisting of cash and/or property (including presses and typographical tools, if her father was a printer), was usually reinvested by the husband or used to settle debts. However, he was required to return the dowry or the monetary value of the goods upon his death. Thus a printer or book merchant with large debts who died without having made legal restitution of the dowry could have his estate seized by the widow. Consider the case of Dorotea Scotto, wife of Andrea Calvo, a highly successful Milanese book merchant. From 1543 to 1546, Dorotea filed a series of lawsuits against her husband, claiming he had squandered away her livelihood (a substantial dowry of five thousand lire) to pay off his debts. Reduced to poverty and unable to support herself and seven children, Dorotea placed a lien (*apprehensio*) on Calvo’s assets. These included large stocks of books in two shops and warehouses in Milan as well as books in Pavia, all of which she seized. One year before her husband’s death in 1546, she took control of his business. Along with her brother, Girolamo (Calvo’s erstwhile associate), she ran it successfully for the next ten years, nearly doubling the stocks of books found in Calvo’s warehouses a decade earlier. During this period she conducted business with the Giolito firm in Venice, negotiated dowries for her daughters, and sold books to local merchants in Milan. Her case was not unusual. In 1596 Clara Somasca, the wife of the Milanese

bookseller Antonio degli Antoni, also seized her late husband's estate because he too had failed to make restitution of her dowry. A similar case shows up in Florence as well, involving the heirs of the printer Giorgio Marescotti. When he died intestate in 1602, his wife, Agnoletta and son, Cristofano, entered into extended litigation over his estate. Though much of it was sold to pay off debts, Agnoletta continued to sell his books. Soon after Cristofano expired in 1611, his wife Margherita took over the business. However, with no family members to help her run the operation and unable to secure the monopoly her late husband had on printing official edicts, laws, and pronouncements in Florence, the business floundered. As Margherita's case shows, success for a woman in the early book trade depended largely on maintaining the continuity of a family firm, drawing on well-established family networks, and working with her husband's business connections.

The death of a husband and the need to maintain his printing and/or bookselling operation was the most compelling reason for a woman to continue working in the book trade. Not surprisingly, the difficulties of keeping the business running led numerous widows to remarry other printers and book merchants, including those who had worked in her husband's shops. If she had a son, who was usually the beneficiary of the business, she would provide him with adequate training in the craft before he took over the business. If she remained single, however, she might manage the operation with the help of siblings or a skilled artisan. For instance, when the Milanese bookseller Jacopo Corsico passed away in 1536, he left his wife Elisabetta Barechis with three children to raise and the added responsibility of running his bookshop. Within six months she had hired another bookseller, Pietro Antonio Sessa, to help manage the shop on the condition that he agree in writing to teach both Elisabetta and her eldest son (Giovanni Francesco) the art of bookselling ("*docere et instuere Elisabet*

*et Iohannes Francisci in dicta arte librarie*"). Similar cases are documented for widows of printers. When the Venetian printer Nicolo' Bevilacqua passed away in 1573, his widow, Teodosia, hired her son-in-law, Francesco Ziletti, to run Nicolo's press until her eight-year-old son and universal heir, Giovanni Battista, had reached maturity. A similar situation obtained for Luchina, wife of the Roman printer Pietro Ravani, who managed her husband's firm with the help of the printer Giovanni Varisco until her son, Vittorio, came of age. Even more revealing is the example of Veronica Sessa, who after the death of her husband, the large-scale Venetian publisher Melchior Sessa, hired her brothers to help her supervise the operation. The range and complexity of Veronica's business activities are striking. She bestowed power of attorney, arranged dowries, negotiated business contracts, and collected debts. She was not alone as a woman bookseller and publisher of extraordinary business talents, as the careers of Dorotea Scotto, Paola Blada, Lucrezia Dorico, and Cecilia Tramezzino also testify.

Why did women of the late Renaissance rarely sign the books they published? The answer has less to do with cultural constraints than with sound business practice—namely, the need to maintain the quality and proven reliability of an established publishing firm. Privileges were typically granted to a widow based on the longevity and reputation of her husband's business. Keeping his name, his mark, and his shop sign was essential for success. The career of Aurelia da Ponte, daughter of the printer Pacifico da Ponte, exemplifies this trend. Da Ponte had been the official typographer for the archbishop of Milan and the city's most prolific printer for nearly twenty-five years when he died without male issue in 1594. Aurelia, who inherited half of his business, continued its operation, publishing liturgical and religious texts for the archdiocese with a father-and-son team of printers who had worked in her father's shops. Colophons on the books they published read "*eredi di Pacifico Pontio*" or "*nella stamparia del*

*quondam Pacifico da Ponte*" (In the printing shop of the former Pacifico da Ponte). There are, however, a few exceptional women who did sign their names to books, including Caterina De Silvestro (in Naples), Elisabetta Rusconi (in Venice), and Girolama Cartolari (in Rome). When her husband, Sigismondo Mayr, died in 1517, De Silvestro took over the business and added typographical innovations (such as italic type and ornamental letters) to Mayr's stocks of type. At first she signed her books "Madonna Caterina who was [the] wife of master Sigismondo Mayr." By 1522, however, she preferred to sign them as being printed "in the house of Catherine de Silvestro," a clear indication of the respect she had earned as a female printer. Much the same can be said for Girolama Cartolari, who after the death of her husband, Baldassare, in 1543 directed his book operation for the next sixteen years. A prolific printer, she followed Baldassare's publication program closely, printing papal bulls, pronouncements issued by the apostolic chamber, religious pamphlets, anti-Lutheran tracts, and works of authors who spent time at the court of Pope Paul III.

There were, of course, women outside Italy who also led highly successful careers as printers, publishers, and booksellers. Most notable among these—Yolande Bonhomme, Charlotte Guillard (who spent fifty years in the trade), Françoise de Louvain, and Nicole Vostre in Paris; Madeleine de Portunais and Jeanne Giunta in Lyon; Margarethe Pruss in Strasbourg—overcame the same financial hurdles and social constraints faced by Italian women to break into the book industry. Women north and south of the Alps made significant contributions to the early modern book trade, even if their names appear infrequently on the books they manufactured and sold. They were not marginal to this industry. These "bookwomen" deserve the same recognition as their male counterparts in the scholarly literature on early printing and publishing in Europe.

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See also *Work and Women*.

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## Public Speaking and Women. See Rhetoric, Public Speaking, and Women.

### Pulci, Antonia Tanini (1452/54–1501)

*Florentine writer of popular mystery and miracle plays published in numerous editions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.*

Antonia Pulci was born sometime between 1452 and 1454, the daughter of Francesco d'Antonio di Giannotto Tanini, a merchant; her mother was a Roman woman, Jacopa di Torello di Lorenzo Torelli, whose family was from Trastevere. There were five sisters and a